

Nuclear 'Beach Ball' Heralds Atomic Age for Southland: Nuclear 'Beach Ball' Heralds Age of Atom

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Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File); Jan 29, 1968;

ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1989)

pg. B1

Nuclear 'Beach Ball' Heralds Atomic Age for Southland

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Times Urban Affairs Editor

A huge steel ball on the beach below San Clemente has brought a new dimension to Southern California's changing environment.

To surfers and boaters, looking back from the water, it stands out like a silver-white balloon silhouetted against the coastal bluffs. Motorists approaching it are awed by the ball's dimensions.

Yet its impact reaches far beyond the highway and narrow strip of beach where it rests in a corner of the Camp Pendleton Marine Corps Base.

People in the San Clemente area, including some who fought to keep the sphere and its related complex of nuclear power generating facilities from being built, call it "the beach ball."

Housed inside the steel and concrete-based structure is a nuclear reactor vessel loaded with \$27 million worth of fuel, enough to last more than three years.

Others in Planning Stages

The ball is the first of many that may be popping up along the Southern California coast in the next 10 to 20 years to provide a new supply of electricity and water for the nation's fastest-growing region.

Nuclear plants to provide power alone and others with the dual ability to generate energy and purify sea water for the Southland's cities are well into the planning stage.

And, looking farther into the future, dual purpose plants with the added capacity to produce fertilizer

are being envisioned for agricultural development of coastal desert lands.

This could extend the string of A-plant "beach balls" into Baja California—beyond the metropolis taking shape between Santa Barbara and San Diego.

Looming like some outer-planetary object, the coastal ball near San Clemente is the most spectacular part of an \$87 million nuclear power plant which has been producing commercial electricity for Southern California homes and factories since Jan. 1.

Enough for 500,000

For nearly a month, power has been pouring from the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station, the nation's newest atom plant and one of the world's largest.

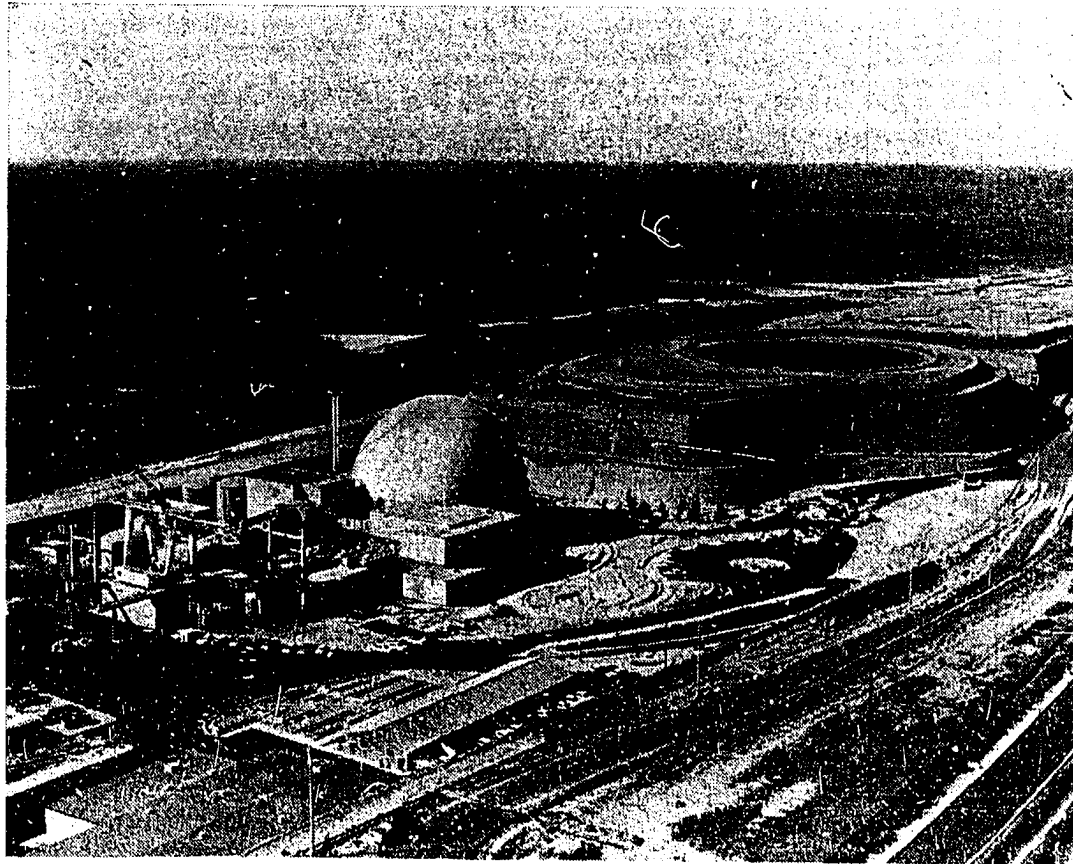
The facility is sending 450,000 kilowatts of electrical energy—enough to supply a city of 500,000—into the Southern California Edison Co. and San Diego Gas and Electric Co. systems.

The output from San Onofre, three miles south of San Clemente, provides only a fraction of the power Edison supplies its customers in 14 Southern California counties and two in Southern Nevada. It amounts to 5% of the system's nearly 9 million kilowatt capacity.

San Diego G&E, the plant's co-builder with Edison, gets 20% of the nuclear power for communities in San Diego and part of southern Orange County.

Yet while San Onofre's output

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NUCLEAR POWER STATION--Steel sphere, near center of picture, houses the nuclear components of the San Onofre nuclear generating station. The sta-

tion will provide 450,000 kilowatts of electricity for Southern California Edison Co. and San Diego Gas & Electric Co.—enough power for a city of 500,000.

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seems small compared to Southern California's enormous capacity for power, it represents a significant early step in introducing the region to nuclear-produced energy.

Edison built the West's first commercial plant, a 6,500-kilowatt facility, at Santa Susana in 1957 but it was intended primarily for research. Now shut down, its development trimmed years off Edison's plan to build a full-scale plant at San Onofre.

"For Edison, this represents the culmination of almost 15 years of research and development in the field of nuclear energy," Edison president Jack K. Horton said at the San Onofre plant's dedication early this month.

Angry Charges

Dr. Glenn T. Seaborg, chairman of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, recalled Southern California's role in the development of nuclear energy. And he added:

"Now that nuclear power—one of the most beneficial applications of nuclear energy—has come of age, the San Onofre station represents another important step in California's growth and progress."

Almost everyone at the dedication overlooked—or had forgotten—the angry charges raised at AEC hearings several years ago about the plant's hazards and its threat to public safety.

But Rep. Chet Holifield (D-Calif.), vice chairman of the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy, remembered. He put it this way:

"We in California seem to have the knack of generating exciting special problems about sites for nuclear power plants.

"This is the kind of excitement many of us would prefer to do without. Anyone who expects to succeed in this business has to have lots of patience—and he can't have a nervous stomach."

Now that the plant is in operation, after a three-year construction period, most of the resentment and fear seems to have vanished.

Part of Scenery

A San Clemente spokesman says the plant is now a "welcome part of the coastal scenery."

Its 75 employees live in the San Clemente area and more than 300,000 persons have stopped by San Onofre's visitors' center in nearly three years. All this has bolstered the community's economy.

At one time San Clemente considered annexing the 83-acre plant site, but the plan was dropped because of legal problems. The city, located in Orange County, found it could not annex property in another county and San Onofre is just across the line in San Diego County.

Edison is paying the Navy Department \$90,000 a year for the site, which is large enough to develop 2 million kilowatts, four times the new plant's capacity.

With Southern California's population expected to double by 1990, Edison will need the additional capacity. The power demand within its system doubles every 7½ years.

Lowest Possible Cost

"We must build to be able to supply that demand and nuclear generating plants offer a way to provide the needed energy at the lowest possible cost," Horton says.

Nationally, according to estimates, eight out of 10 of the power generating plants built by the year 2000 will be nuclear-fueled. Sixteen are already in operation and 17 are under construction.

Like Edison and its San Diego partner, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power—the nation's largest municipally owned utility—is turning to nuclear power to help supply electricity for the city's 2.8 million residents.

In 1962, it proposed a \$93 million, 400,000 kilowatt plant—the world's largest—at Malibu but the plan became bogged down in a

lengthy series of AEC hearings.

Malibu residents, alarmed by the possibility of earthquakes and the plant's threat to the resort community's esthetic values, presented a forceful case which has delayed AEC approval.

Now the department, which probably would have been seeing its own nuclear "beach ball" take shape at Malibu by now, is preparing an amended application and expects to pursue the project. Even so, it still faces opposition from a militant community.

Although the department has been stymied, at least temporarily, at Malibu, it has joined Edison and San Diego G&E as a partner in Southern California's largest nuclear-power project—a combined generating and desalination plant at Bolsa Island near Huntington Beach and Seal Beach.

Construction has not yet started. The project still must clear many hurdles, including opposition from the beach communities which is certain to develop at AEC hearings.

150 Million Gallons

But by 1972, if the present timetable is followed, power and purified water from the ocean will be going into hundreds of Southern California cities from the Bolsa Island facility.

The power plants will have a capacity of 1.8 million kilowatts, enough to meet the needs of a city of 2 million.

And, desalted water from the man-made island plant, eventually amounting to 150 million gallons a day, will be sufficient to supply a city the size of San Francisco.

Although the Bolsa Island plant will be the largest desalting facility in

the world, its output will amount to only about one-tenth of the Colorado River water imported for Southern California's coastal communities.

Even so, the Metropolitan Water District, a principal partner in the \$434 million combined desalination-power project, views the desalting unit—the largest in the world—as the start to provide Southern California with an assured water supply.

Specific plans have not been announced, but Metropolitan is known to be interested in building other desalination plants as the cost of purifying water for urban consumption comes down with the use of nuclear power.

Complex of Plants

The Bureau of Reclamation has also made guarded suggestions about plans for a complex of huge desalting plants, perhaps on the Southern California coast, to build up the natural supply in the Colorado River.

In the meantime, Edison has announced plans for a mammoth nuclear generating power complex three miles east of Point Conception in Santa Barbara County. The first \$200 million unit is expected to be in operation by 1975.

As Edison envisions the completed project, well beyond 1975, it would have six 1 million-kilowatt units built at a cost of \$1.2 billion. The complex would provide enough electricity for 7 million people.

AEC officials, recognizing this region's soaring demand for power and new supplies of water, foresee almost unlimited development of nuclear facilities along the Southern California coast. San Onofre and the Bolsa Island plant fortify that view.

Speaking at San Onofre's dedication, James T. Ramey, AEC commissioner, put it this way:

"Much of the future of nuclear power seems destined for this area."